



## California Postsecondary Education Commission

# College-Going Rates: A Performance Measure in California's Higher Education Accountability Framework

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*As part of its work in developing an accountability framework for higher education, the Commission conducted an analysis of college-going rates in California. This analysis showed that:*

- California has serious inequities in access to higher education. College-going rates vary greatly depending on students' ethnicity, gender, and the type of neighborhood where the student's high school is located.*
- California's college-going rate for four-year colleges is lower than in most other states.*
- College-going rates measure access to higher education, but are only one part of the accountability picture.*
- Information on how well students progress through higher education and on the value of their degrees in the job market is needed to assess how well the State is doing in making the benefits of higher education available to students leaving high school.*

## Introduction

College-going rates are an important measure of how well California is doing in providing students with the opportunity to attend college after high school. State and national data show that about 26% of California's high school graduates enroll at four-year public and private universities shortly after completing high school. About one third of the State's high school graduates enroll at community colleges directly after high school. These college-going rates are lower than in most other states, and well below the level of participation that students and parents desire.

The data also raise serious equity issues. Latino and African-American males have very low college-going rates. College-going rates for students from schools in poorer neighborhoods are much lower than for students from schools in more affluent neighborhoods. These figures suggest that current efforts to ensure equal access and participation fall short of what is needed.

## Goals for College-Going

The California Education Code states that "It is the intent of the Legislature that each resident of California who has the capacity and motivation to benefit from higher education should have the opportunity to enroll in an institution of higher education," and adds "The Legislature hereby reaffirms the commitment of the State of

## The Commission's Accountability Framework

This report is one in a series examining performance measures in the Commission's accountability framework for higher education in California. The framework, adopted in June 2006, consists of 17 performance measures corresponding to four goals: Student Preparation for College, Affordability and Access, Student Success in Progressing through

College, and Public Benefits of Postsecondary Education.

California spends over \$14 billion a year on higher education. The accountability framework helps gauge how well taxpayer dollars are being spent and informs policymakers of progress made toward achieving the State's goals for higher education.

California to provide an appropriate place in California public higher education for every student who is willing and able to benefit from attendance.” (CEC §66201)

Recent surveys show that most high school students want to go to a college or university. For example, a survey of tenth-graders taking the California High School Exit Exam found that nearly 45% wanted to go to a four-year university and a further 30% wanted to go to a community college or technical school.

The State’s 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education recommends that the California State University should set its entrance requirement so that one-third of California high school graduates would qualify for admission. The plan also has language suggesting that most or all eligible students should be admitted. This suggests an overall college-going rate for four-year universities of about 30%.

### **Four-Year College-Going Rates**

About 1 in 4 of California’s high school graduates enter four-year colleges and universities directly after leaving high school. About 4% of California high school graduates go to four-year colleges in other states, with the remainder entering California’s two public university systems and independent universities in the State. The Commission’s Student Data System indicates that 7.0% of California high school graduates entered the University of California (UC) and 9.9% entered the California State University (CSU) in 2004.

The Commission’s Student Data System has more recent data for California’s public systems. In 2005, 10.7% of California’s high school graduates entered the CSU and 7.1% entered the UC. College-going rates for the CSU are now well above the rates of the late 1990s. For the UC, college-going rates are now slightly below the 7.5–7.8% of the late 1990s.

**Equity in access.** The Commission’s data show some glaring inequities in higher education. College-going rates vary greatly depending on student ethnicity, gender, and the type of neighborhood where the student’s high school is located.

The variation is particularly dramatic at the University of California, the State’s more selective public system.

Rates for African-American and Latino males are very low. Only 1.3% of male African-American graduates from high schools in low-income areas entered the University of California in 2005. Even for schools in high-income areas, where college-going rates are generally higher, the UC college-going rate for male African-Americans was only 3.3%. For comparison, the UC college-going rates for Asian females were 13.7% for schools in low-income areas and 27.9% for schools in high-income areas.

With its lower cost and greater number of campuses, the California State University system provides greater access to a more diverse student body. But despite these strengths, direct college-going rates at the CSU campuses also reflect barriers to enrollment. At the CSU, there is less variation in college-

**College-Going Rates, 2004**

	Number	Percent
California high school graduates	375,900	100%
Freshmen entering:		
University of California	26,300	7.0%
California State University	37,300	9.9
Independent universities	17,300	4.6
Out-of-state universities	16,400	4.4
Total four-year	97,300	25.9
Community colleges	113,100	30.1

Commission calculations based on data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the Commission’s Student Data System.

2004 is the latest year available in the NCES data.

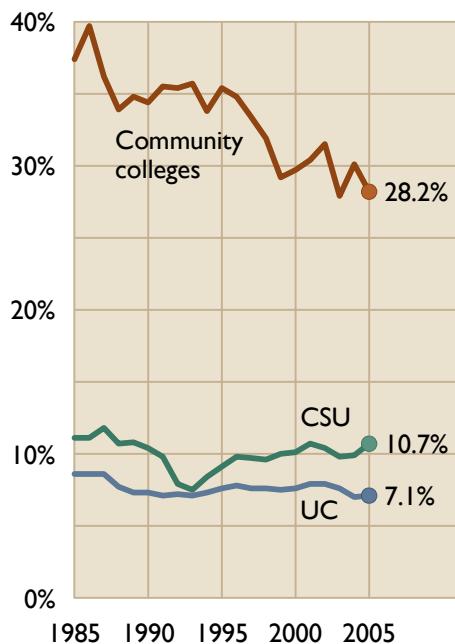
going between neighborhoods and ethnic groups, but more of a gap between males and females. Asian females from schools in low-income areas had a CSU college-going rate of 17.8%, but the corresponding rate for males was only 12.2%. There is a similar gender gap for African-Americans and, to a lesser extent, Latinos.

## Community Colleges

In recent years, 28–30% of high school graduates entered community colleges directly after high school, compared with around 35% in the early 1990s. For community colleges, college-going rates do not vary much between neighborhoods and between ethnic groups. There is a slight gender gap; but in this case, college-going rates for males are generally higher than rates for females.

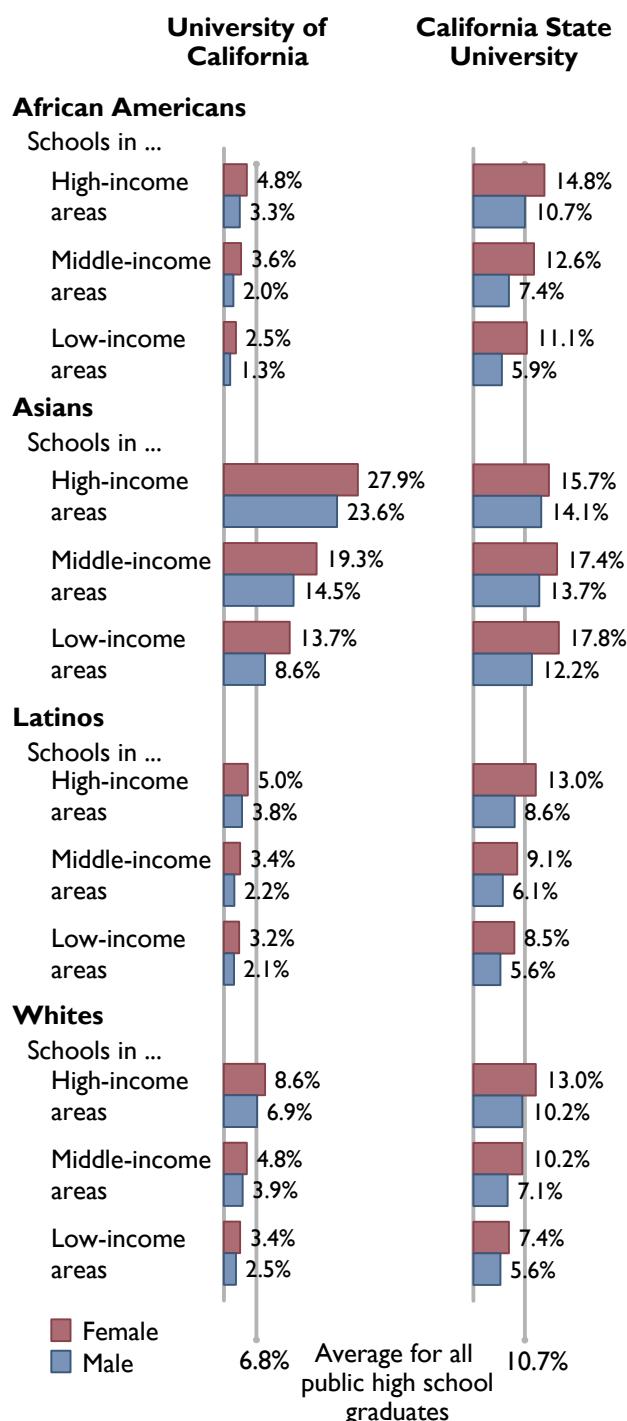
More details on the variation of college-going rates are in two recent Commission publications: (1) *The Impact of Socioeconomic Factors on College-Going Rates* (FS/06-04); and (2) *College-Going Rates of California Public High School Graduates: Statewide and Local Figures* (WP/03-06).

## College-Going Rates for California's Public Systems



Data from the Commission's Student Data System

## College-Going Rates California Public High Schools, 2005



The ethnicity and gender of students is not available for private high school graduates, so this breakdown can be calculated only for public high school graduates.

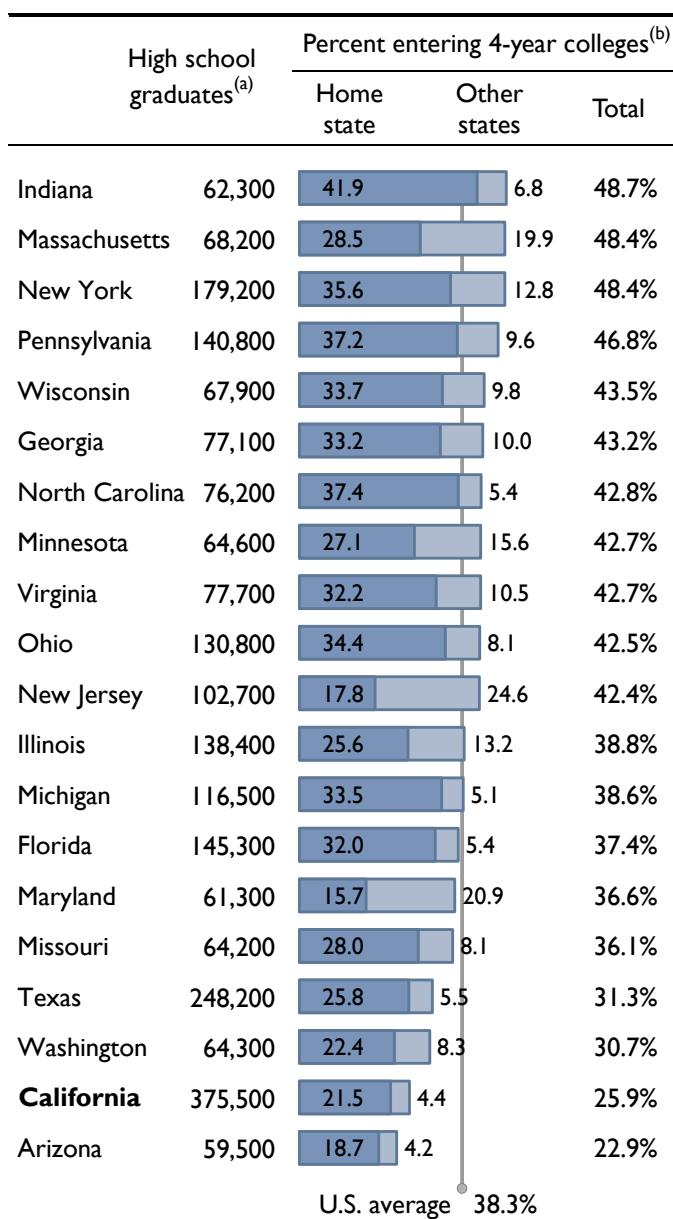
## Comparisons with Other States

National data show that the college-going rates in California are lower than in most other states. In 2004, 21.5% of California's high school graduates entered four-year universities in California and 4.4% entered universities in other states, making a total four-year college-going rate of 25.9%. These figures include both public and private universities. The national average four-year college-going rate is 38.3%. Only two states—Arizona and Mississippi—have lower college-going rates than California.

Comparisons of college-going rates for two-year colleges are more difficult. According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 17.8% of California's high school graduates entered two-year colleges—about the same as the U.S. average. However, the NCES figure for entrants to two-year colleges does not match data from California sources. NCES showed 65,700 California high school graduates entering degree and certificate programs in two-year colleges in 2004. The Commission's data shows a much higher level of enrollment—about 111,000 recent high school graduates entering degree and certificate programs at community colleges and a further 5,000 entering other for-credit programs. These figures give a two-year college-going rate of at least 30%.

These discrepancies are likely to be the result of differences in data collection procedures and definitions. NCES apparently uses a more restrictive definition of a student entering a degree or certificate program in its data. Because data with definitions similar to those used in the California data has not been compiled for other states, it is difficult to compare the rate of two-year college-going in California with the rest of the U.S.

## Four-Year College-Going: Largest 20 States, 2004



Commission calculations based on data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

<sup>(a)</sup>Public and private high schools. NCES estimate of 2004 public high school graduates, plus a Commission estimate of 2004 private high school graduates based on 2001 NCES data.

<sup>(b)</sup>NCES data for public and private colleges. Number of freshmen in degree-granting institutions who graduated from high school in the previous 12 months as a percentage of the number of high school graduates in each state.

## Strategies for Increasing College-Going

To better understand the inequities regarding access to higher education, the Commission is in the process of identifying schools with high college-going rates that have characteristics usually associated with lower college-going. As an initial step, the Commission has identified several high schools worth studying with above-average college-going rates. The strategies used at these schools are described in the sidebar.

It is too soon to conclude exactly what strategies are most effective for increasing college-going rates. One barrier that must be addressed is eligibility. The percentage of high school graduates who qualify for university admission by completing the required courses and taking college admission tests varies greatly between schools and between ethnic groups. A Commission study showed that in 2003, only about 6% of African-American and Latino high school graduates took the courses and tests required for UC eligibility, compared with 16% of White graduates, and 31% of Asian graduates. Therefore, the weight placed on specific eligibility criteria can significantly impact eligibility of potential students.

One encouraging sign is that the percentage of eligible high school graduates who actually enter the UC and the CSU does not vary much between ethnic groups. This would suggest that access to higher education could be broadened significantly if more students from schools in lower-income areas were able to take the courses and tests required for university admission.

However, eligibility is by no means the only obstacle to college-going. Geographic accessibility, college costs, and cultural attitudes all affect a student's ability to qualify for and enter higher

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**Van Nuys High School** has three magnet schools within its overall structure. These magnet programs consist of 1,300 students out of a total enrollment of 3,000. With almost half of the students in a magnet program, the culture of the campus is transformed into one with a greater emphasis on postsecondary education and the paths to obtain such an education.

**Rosemead High School**, in addition to encouraging and providing as much information for students as possible about college, relies on career guidance counseling to prepare students for college. Starting with sophomores, entire classes are arranged to meet with career guidance counselors to discuss a path to college education.

**Gabrielino High School** attributes a high college-going rate to a very good counselor-to-student proportion. For 1,800 students there are five counselors. In addition to the small population of the campus, students are given quality information, opportunities for college recruitment, access to many modern facilities, and overall exposure to more resources that help lead to a successful college career.

**John W. North High School** relies on AP exams to successfully achieve a high college-going rate. John W. North is in the top ten in California for AP exams passed with 400 AP exams in 17 different subject areas. In addition to this, students are encouraged to participate in an advanced study program with UC Riverside that provides students an opportunity to conduct research alongside UC Riverside staff.

**Rialto High School** has a program called Small Learning Communities that lets students choose their own pathway into college. Freshmen and sophomore academies prepare students for college and help them choose a career path. Students then enter an academy program in the school that gives them the opportunity to further develop a career plan. In addition, staff from the career center are regularly invited into classes to talk with students about college. Local partnerships have also been made with many local colleges that allow students to gain college experience while still at high school.

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education. These factors interact, particularly since students who do not believe they can afford college may tend not to complete the required courses and take the tests needed for university admission. In addition, if students are to get on the college track in time to complete the requirements before they graduate, they must see a connection between postsecondary education and success in life.

College-going is affected by a wide variety of factors. The State still lacks rigorous answers to a number of important questions, including:

- What are the factors that could drive changes in college-going rates?
- What is the relative significance of each factor?
- How do these factors interact?
- How can we influence these factors to diminish inequities?

Commission staff is researching these questions and hopes to identify more effective strategies to help students overcome barriers to higher education.

## Next Steps

As the Commission moves forward with its accountability system, it will refine how to use the college-going rate performance measure as an indicator to track progress toward the State's goals for higher education. However, college-going rates are only part of the accountability picture. To assess how well the state is doing in making the benefits of higher education available to students, data on college-going rates must be combined with data on entry rates, graduation rates, time-to-degree, and the match between degrees awarded and workforce needs. Combining this information will show how well California is doing in meeting the goal of providing high school students with the opportunity to enter, move through, and benefit from its higher education system.

### Sources of Data

The Commission is the State's clearinghouse for data on higher education. The Commission's Student Data System consists of enrollment data provided by the University of California, the California State University, the California Community Colleges, and California's independent colleges and universities. The Student Data System also includes data on high school enrollments provided by the California Department of Education. The Commission calculates college-going rates by dividing high school graduates in each year by a count of freshmen entering colleges. The Commission's data includes the age, ethnicity, gender, and high school of each student allowing a very detailed breakdown of college-going rates.

College-going rates for other states are derived from data summaries published by the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

NCES conducts a survey of college enrollment every two years. One of the data elements collected from colleges is a count of first-time undergraduate students who graduated from high school in the previous 12 months, grouped by the student's state of residence. NCES also collects data on high school graduates from state education departments. The Commission used these two sources of data to calculate the number of high school graduates entering universities and colleges as a percentage of total high school graduates in each state.

Not all independent universities and colleges report enrollments to the Commission, so college-going rates for California independent universities and colleges are estimated as the difference between overall college-going indicated by the NCES data and college-going in the California public systems from the Commission's Student Data System.



